

VZCZCXRO1765
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHRB #1721/01 3121614
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081614Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7730
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4835
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3662

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001721

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL ON ANNAPOLIS,
SYRIA-LEBANON, IRAN

REF: RABAT 1187

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Robert P. Jackson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Director-General for Multilateral Relations Amb. Mohammed Azeroual stressed Morocco's support for the Annapolis peace conference and the Kingdom's "excellent" contacts with Israel during a November 7 meeting. Azeroual, who is de facto P-level and focused mainly on Arab and Islamic Affairs, advised us that Morocco had in September moved its diplomatic mission to the Palestinians from Gaza to Ramallah. Azeroual also opined that Arab and international pressure on Syria was the best way to support open presidential elections and stability in Lebanon. Azeroual said his recent round of consultations in GCC states revealed anxiety about Iran's regional ambitions and some fear of an Iranian response to possible U.S. military action. End summary.

Morocco Supports Annapolis Process

¶2. (C) In a November 7 call on Amb. Mohammed Azeroual, the Moroccan MFA's Director-General (P-level) point man on Arab and Islamic Affairs, the Charge conveyed U.S. appreciation for Morocco's constructive role in the search for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Azeroual affirmed Morocco's strong support for the Annapolis Conference, pointing to a statement by King Mohammed VI which welcomed the U.S. initiative during French President Sarkozy's late October visit to Morocco. (Note: Azeroual had previously demarched us about Morocco's strong interest in being invited to participate in the fall peace conference (reftel). He did not repeat this request after the Charge advised him that the USG had not yet issued invitations. End note.) Asked about Morocco's relations with Israel, Azeroual characterized them as "excellent." Contacts between the GOM and GOI were continuous and pragmatic, he noted.

¶3. (C) Azeroual added that Morocco was a firm supporter of Palestinian President Abbas' government. In September, despairing of a resolution to the Hamas-Abbas split, Morocco closed its diplomatic mission in Gaza and opened in Ramallah. The GOI facilitated this transfer, he added. Reprising a by-now familiar Moroccan refrain, Azeroual observed "we are the only Arab state which has not received a Hamas delegation."

To Save Lebanon, Press Syria

¶4. (C) The Charge took the opportunity to underline U.S. concern about possible Syrian interference in Lebanon's

upcoming presidential election and asked Azeroual about Morocco's views of the precarious political situation in Beirut. A member of the Arab League team which negotiated the Taif Accord, Azeroual has first hand experience with many of the key players in Lebanon. Azeroual agreed that the situation in Lebanon was dangerous, with Syria and Hizbollah apparently pursuing a strategy of liquidating key March 14 leaders to alter the balance within the Parliament. He thought Saad Hariri's strategy of sequestering March 14 parliamentarians made sense in the current context, and would keep them alive and voting.

15. (C) Morocco has been a consistent supporter of PM Seniora, Azeroual stressed, and opposed foreign intervention of all stripes - Syrian, Iranian, and Israeli. Arab states and the international community should step up pressure on Syria to make clear that interference and subversion in the coming elections will not be tolerated, Azeroual stated. Persuading Syria to alter its course will also defuse Iranian influence and Hizbollah's strength in Lebanon, as Syria is the door through which Iranian arms and largesse enter the country.

GCC Panicky About Iran-U.S. Tension

16. (C) Azeroual told the Charge he had recently returned from a consultative tour of GCC states. He found GCC governments preoccupied by Iran's ambitions in the region and its conflict with the international community. His GCC interlocutors were deeply alarmed that possible U.S. military action would provoke an unpredictable and likely dangerous Iranian response, he added. Former Moroccan Ambassador in Tehran, Azeroual described former President Rafsanjani's

RABAT 00001721 002 OF 002

recent statements as "realistic" and noted that the rift between his camp and Ahmedinejad's was becoming increasingly clear. Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's recent call for talks with the U.S. also clearly indicated the internal strategic debate in Iran, he opined. Less clear was whether Iranian skeptics of Ahmedinejad's approach would be able to restrain him, he opined. Azeroual further expressed concern that instability could spread from Iran across Central Asia, where several states appeared to be standing on shaky foundations with restive populations.

17. (C) Comment: One of the MFA's most frequent travelers, and a regular behind-the-scenes figure at Arab League Ministerials and other diplomatic events, Azeroual is a key figure in Morocco's policy toward the Middle East and Islamic World. Azeroual was cagey about what former FM Benaissa's departure might mean for his own role in Moroccan foreign policy, though we believe it could well constitute a de facto promotion for himself, as it has for many of our other MFA contacts. We suspect that Azeroual may attend at least some events in Fassi-Fihri's stead that would have earlier required ministerial attention. He also seems to be increasingly visible in Morocco's sub-Saharan diplomacy. End comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Jackson